

WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOUR WORK WITH PARENTS

Despite recent progress toward legal and social equality for LGBTQ* Americans, societal stigma remains strong and LGBTQ parents continue to experience barriers when engaging with child welfare systems. For example, in a recent HRC survey, child welfare professionals acknowledged that bias against LGBTQ foster and adoptive parents still exists.¹ Nineteen percent of participants felt that straight/heterosexual foster or adoptive parents are preferable to LGBTQ parents. Similarly, nearly a quarter of respondents expressed a preference for cisgender (non-transgender) parents.

Now — as some lawmakers work to legalize discrimination against LGBTQ adults seeking to foster or adopt — it is perhaps more important than ever for child welfare systems to take action to ensure LGBTQ adults receive the services they deserve free from discrimination. This is not only the right thing to do. It is necessary work in order to ensure compliance with federal standards around LGBTQ non-discrimination

and the best practice recommendations of leading professional associations.

Every single child welfare professional — from frontline workers to administrators and executives — has a role to play and this Beginner's Guide to LGBTQ Inclusion is designed to give you ideas of where to start, addressing several areas, including:

- » LGBTQ-competent approaches to work with parents under investigation for child abuse or neglect or who are working toward reunification with a child who has been removed.
- » LGBTQ-competent approaches for work with prospective and current foster, adoptive, and kinship parents ("resource parents").
- » Strategies for recruiting, developing, and supporting a pool of LGBTQ-affirming resource parents — both LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ parents — so all youth experience placement stability and permanency regardless of SOGIE.*

TERMS TO KNOW:

***LGBTQ:** Acronym for "lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning."

Lesbian: Describes women who are attracted to other women.

Gay: Describes people who are attracted to members of their same gender.

Bisexual: Describes people who are attracted to more than one gender.

Transgender: Describes a person whose gender identity does not align with their sex assigned at birth.

Queer: Describes fluid identities and orientations, sometimes used interchangeably with "LGBT."

Questioning: Describes people who are in the process of exploring their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression.

***SOGIE:** Acronym for "sexual orientation, gender identity and expression." Everyone has SOGIE, not only LGBTQ people.

Sexual Orientation: A person's emotional, romantic and sexual attraction to other people.

Gender Identity: A person's internal sense of being male, female, or, for some people, a blend of both or neither.

Gender Expression: The ways people show their gender to others through clothing, haircut, roles and activities, etc.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

LGBTQ-INCLUSIVE WORK WITH BIRTH PARENTS FRONT-LINE STAFF AND SUPERVISORS

- » **Be mindful of the possibility that SOGIE may be part of the family dynamics in child protection cases.** A young person could be experiencing rejection from their parents due to SOGIE.* Or there could be worker bias about the parents' SOGIE that may affect decisions about removal, family preservation goals or family reunification efforts. Families are often experiencing a confluence of factors that put them at risk for child maltreatment. This is not to say that SOGIE-related factors will be the only ones to address, rather, that it is key to recognize and explore the relevance of SOGIE in addition to other risk factors.
- » **Identify existing resources and services.** that can help families increase their accepting behaviors toward LGBTQ youth (e.g., Family Acceptance Project) and help birth parents connect with these resources.²

LEADERS AND MANAGERS

- » **Develop a shared understanding with your organizational partners** (e.g., police, community organizations, etc.) on how they will align with your policies and practices around LGBTQ inclusion and non-discrimination and use of affirming and appropriate practices.
- » **Work with judges, CASAs, and GALs** to ensure that they understand the role a youth or parent's SOGIE may be playing in a case. Partner with these key decision-makers and stakeholders and equip them with appropriate information.

BUILDING A POOL OF LGBTQ-AFFIRMING RESOURCE FAMILIES

Take a comprehensive approach to building a pool of LGBTQ-affirming resource families. This involves recruiting both LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ prospective parents. It also requires working with all of your current resource families to assess their readiness to support and affirm LGBTQ youth and providing them with appropriate resources.

FRONT-LINE STAFF AND SUPERVISORS

- » **Share information about the diversity**

of youth in foster care as you engage

prospective parents. This should include the fact that there are many LGBTQ youth in care and that any young person placed with a family could potentially self-identify as LGBTQ at some point.

- » **Assess the capacity of your current resource families** acknowledging that they will fall along a continuum ranging from accepting to rejecting of LGBTQ youth. Some of your current resource families may not be interested in developing their LGBTQ competency but with the appropriate education and support they can become more open to this.
- » **Discuss how your agency will handle resource families who are rejecting of LGBTQ youth.** At a minimum, employ your best efforts to avoid placing an LGBTQ young person with a family ill-equipped to affirm and support that young person.
- » **Provide information and learning opportunities to help resource families** assess their own attitudes, biases, strengths, and challenges for meeting the needs of all children and youth in foster care, including LGBTQ youth.
- » **Educate all current and prospective resource families about the importance of affirming LGBTQ young people.** Utilize resources such as the Family Acceptance Project.¹

LEADERS AND MANAGERS

- » **Review and update your pre-service and ongoing training for resource families to include specific information about LGBTQ youth and their needs.** Create opportunities for parents to explore how they would address various situations (e.g., a youth coming out while in their family, talking with LGBTQ youth about healthy relationships and sexuality, affirming gender-expansive youth, etc.).

BUILDING YOUR CAPACITY TO RECRUIT, RESPOND TO AND SUPPORT LGBTQ RESOURCE PARENTS

More than three decades worth of social science research demonstrates that LGBTQ parents are just as good as non-LGBTQ parents. An estimated 2 million LGB adults are interested in adoption in the United States.³ Despite these facts, the LGBTQ community

remains an untapped resource for children and youth awaiting permanent families.

- » **Communicate with staff and other key stakeholders about your goals for strengthening the agency's work with LGBTQ resource parents.** Share clear expectations with staff and provide opportunities for them to ask questions. Be prepared to educate and respond to common misconceptions about LGBTQ parents.
- » **Do the work internally before you recruit externally.** Many agencies make the mistake of recruiting from the LGBTQ community before implementing welcoming policies and practices. This can backfire and leave the LGBTQ community feeling misled and mistrusting in the future, meaning fewer families in your pool. Start by assessing the following:
 - » **Recruitment materials** — brochures, TV and radio ads, billboards, etc.—to determine whether they reflect a diverse range of resource families (e.g., same-sex couples, single parents, etc.).
 - » **Agency's forms** and materials used throughout the inquiry-to-licensure process to make sure they are inclusive and welcoming (e.g., using “parent 1 and parent 2” instead of “husband and wife,” etc.).
 - » **Staff response to inquiries** from prospective parents, such as whether they share information about your agency's need for diverse families for the diverse population of youth in foster care and about your agency's commitment to being welcoming to all families.
 - » **Staff's current experience** working with LGBTQ-headed households while conducting licensing and home studies.
 - » **Available support** specifically for LGBTQ families as they await a foster, adoptive, or kinship placement.
 - » **Current training offerings** to determine whether your agency—and any contracted agencies that provide relevant services—includes standardized LGBTQ-specific language, examples, and exercises in all family training (MAPP, PRIDE, etc.), educational activities, or family group meetings.

- » **Partner with local organizations with strong experience working with LGBTQ communities** to develop specific targeted recruitment and response strategies for LGBTQ adults. Be mindful of what past messages or perceptions you may need to counteract (e.g., previous policies or unofficial attitudes about not welcoming LGBTQ adults as resource families).
- » **Review your current recruitment plan to ensure that your agency is reaching one or several LGBTQ audiences** through each method. If you're not, add new activities and materials that will reach those prospective parents.

LEARN MORE

This tip sheet shares a few examples of things you can do to build your—and your agency's—capacity to work effectively with LGBTQ parents and with all parents on SOGIE-related topics. Download the additional tip sheets in this series for more detailed information and ideas on next steps. Also check out the HRC Foundation's All Children–All Families project's innovative self-assessment tools, staff training offerings, and technical assistance for child welfare agencies at www.hrc.org/acaf.

- 1 Human Rights Campaign Foundation (2016) . Serving LGBTQ Youth & Parents: Child Welfare Professionals' Perspectives. Online at: http://hrc-assets.s3-website-us-east-1.amazonaws.com/files/assets/resources/HRC_Child_Welfare_Perspectives_On_Serving_LGBTQ.pdf
- 2 See Family Acceptance Project at: <https://familyproject.sfsu.edu>
- 3 Gates, G. Badgett, M.V.L., Macomber, J., & Chambers, K. Adoption and Foster Care by Lesbian and Gay Parents in the United States. (Washington, DC: The Williams Institute and Urban Institute, 2007). Report.

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